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Expo 2030 Riyadh: Saudi Arabia's Cultural Diplomacy on the Global Stage ^[1]

World Expos have long been recognized as unique arenas for countries to project their national identities, share cultural values, and forge diplomatic connections. For Saudi Arabia, the announcement that Riyadh will host Expo 2030 represents more than a prestigious global event; it is an opportunity to showcase the nation's authentic identity to the world through the lens of cultural diplomacy.

As a Saudi graduate student interested in Public Diplomacy, I see Expo 2030 as both a culmination of decades of international engagement and a launchpad for the Kingdom's evolving role in global cultural exchange. This moment is not about rewriting Saudi Arabia's image, but rather about presenting itself as a nation rooted in heritage, guided by faith, and driven by innovation.

Saudi Arabia is no stranger to Expos. The nation has consistently participated in international exhibitions to share its story and values with the world.

At Expo 2010 Shanghai, the Saudi Pavilion became one of the most visited attractions, welcoming more than 4 million guests. The pavilion showcased the Kingdom's Islamic heritage and development journey, offering visitors a cinematic experience of Saudi landscapes, culture and aspirations.

During Expo 2020 Dubai, the Saudi Pavilion — the second largest at the event — drew more than 4.95 million visitors. Designed with sustainability and innovation at its core, it featured immersive displays of Saudi Arabia's youth-driven future, natural heritage and cultural creativity. This pavilion was a microcosm of the new Saudi Arabia: dynamic, open and proud of its identity.

Saudi Arabia is also presenting its vision at Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, welcoming over two million visitors since its opening in April; highlighting the Kingdom's commitment to sustainability, innovation and cultural dialogue; and further building momentum toward Expo 2030 Riyadh. These participations are far more than mere exhibitions; they are acts of public diplomacy, offering a bridge between Saudi society and global audiences, while setting the stage for Riyadh's turn as host in 2030.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 — the national transformation plan launched in 2016—places culture, tourism and innovation at the center of development. Expo 2030 is perfectly aligned with this vision. Hosting the Expo provides a tangible platform to display the nation's achievements in sustainability, urban design and human progress, while emphasizing its cultural richness.

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hospitality, culture and innovation. This people-to-people engagement is the essence of public diplomacy: creating mutual understanding through authentic cultural exchange. "

Saudi Arabia's theme for Expo 2030, "The Era of Change: Together for a Foresighted Tomorrow," according to [Bureau International des Expositions](#), reflects not only Saudi Arabia's aspirations but also its diplomatic approach: collaboration, foresight and collective responsibility.

Expo 2030 Riyadh will allow Saudi Arabia to present its identity in its full spectrum.

- **Heritage and Tradition:** Visitors will encounter Saudi Arabia's UNESCO World Heritage sites, such as Al-Ula and Diriyah, along with traditions of hospitality, cuisine and art that define Saudi culture. These cultural expressions are not relics of the past but living traditions that continue to shape our society.
- **Innovation and Future:** Alongside heritage, Saudi Arabia will highlight projects like NEOM and The Line, renewable energy initiatives and youth-driven innovation. These initiatives embody the nation's confidence in the future and commitment to global progress.

This dual presentation — heritage and modernity — conveys the image of Saudi Arabia as a nation of deep roots and bold ambitions.

Expos are unique because they engage not just governments, but ordinary people. Millions of visitors from around the world will walk through Riyadh in 2030, directly experiencing Saudi hospitality, culture and innovation. This people-to-people engagement is the essence of public diplomacy: creating mutual understanding through authentic cultural exchange.

From traditional Saudi cuisine to contemporary art and music, the programming at Expo 2030 will provide many touchpoints for cultural dialogue. Each interaction will offer a chance to deepen appreciation of Saudi Arabia beyond stereotypes, allowing the Kingdom to demonstrate its identity on its own terms. Expo 2030 Riyadh will not only amplify Saudi Arabia's voice on the global stage but also create enduring legacies of cooperation, understanding, and respect.

Expo 2030 is more than a global event; it is a statement of identity and diplomacy. For Saudi Arabia, it is the chance to stand before the world with authenticity and pride, showing that the nation's cultural diplomacy is not merely symbolic but a lived expression of who we are. By hosting Expo 2030, Saudi Arabia seeks to affirm its role as a connector of cultures, a steward of heritage and a partner in global innovation. This is cultural diplomacy in its truest form — and it is a story the world will soon see in Riyadh.
